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February 22, 2000 LB 957

SENATOR DIERKS: Thank you, Mr. President. Members of the Legislature, LB 957 is probably one of those bills that you snickered about when you first heard the one-liner. I want to assure the body that the subject of the bill is a serious and important one and I hope that you'll agree the bill is one worthy of your support. I want to explain to you what is meant by carbon sequestration, then quickly walk through the provisions of the bill, and I'll end the opening with some discussion about the potential of carbon sequestration as an additional source of farm income. Carbon sequestration is defined as any process by which carbon is removed from the atmosphere and held in storage, either permanently or for long periods of time. There's a growing interest in methods to increase or induce carbon sequestration due to growing levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Various research has studied the potential of U.S. farmland to absorb carbon dioxide through adoption of favorable stewardship practices. In fact, one of the leading publications on the topic is called "The Potential of U.S. Cropland to Sequester Carbon". It was written...co-written by John Kimble of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Soil Service Laboratory located here in Lincoln. As noted in that publication, 80 percent of U.S. farmland has lost from 40 to 60 percent of its carbon content from precultivation. Essentially, farming and conservation practices which tend to increase organic matter increase the sequestration of carbon. Minimum tillage measures to control erosion, increase plant productivity and establish vegetable covers, all of these which we currently encourage through conservation programs, all tend to increase soil organic matter. Because of the depletion in carbon that has occurred over the years, agricultural land has a great potential to regain carbon content through plant processes and other means. It is this ability to remove carbon from the air and store it in soils that is the subject of this bill. First and foremost, the bill assigns two duties to the Natural Resources Commission in Section 4 and 5 of the bill. Section 4 provides that the director shall provide a report to the Legislature on various matters relating to carbon sequestration, including the potential for the development of markets, for indeed carbon storage is agricultural in...agricultural soils as a reduced or as a result of adaptation or continuation of certain farming practices. Section 5 of the bill directs the